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OUT OF THE SUNSHINE.

BY FRANCES HENSHAW BADEN.

"Oh, mamma, papa smiled just now; almost laughed right out, I believe! An't you glad?" exclaimed Freddie Grafton, the only son of my dearest friend.

These words, said in a voice full of joy, while the boy's eyes were bright and laughing, like his mother's were years before, spoke volumes to me, explaining clearly the sad change I had found in the companion of my childhood and early youth. Each marrying and leaving our village homes, we had been separated for ten years, meeting only the day before for the first time, when I was surprised into exclaiming, as I clasped my arms around her:

"Dear Nellie, how you have changed!"

I had no chance to get a peep into her heart that evening.

Her husband I knew but slightly, having met him but seldom before her marriage.

He had changed but little: a handsome, dignified man, but rather too reserved and quiet to suit me.

What caused the change in Nellie worried me so much, I lay awake many hours trying in vain to account for it.

My mind and heart were both full of these thoughts when Freddie's words reached my ear.

I am sure there was a tear in Nellie's eyes as she glanced hastily at me. Thinking she would have to explain Freddie's words and joyous manner, I suppose, Nellie said:

"You know, Fannie, Mr. Grafton has not a very merry nature; so when the children see him laughing, they are perfectly delighted."

I shut my lips tightly, and managed to keep the sigh down in my heart, as I thought what a rare thing it must be to see "papa smile."

Nellie, with her arm around her boy, asked:

"What was papa laughing about?"

"Why, baby. Nellie made him laugh—the darling, cunning little thing! I'll go bring her," Freddie answered; and tiptoeing out, he returned soon after with the little four-year-old Nellie, who was an excellent caricature of the present fashionable style: with an immense bustle, trailing skirt, huge chignon, and a hat which must have weighed heavy on the little head, crowded with ribbon, lace, feathers and flowers.

"Now walk the Grecian bend, Nellie," said Freddie.

"Me's Dolly Varden," she said; and tossing her head, she did as desired.

I laughed right out, loud and long, at the funny little thing, in whom I could see a spark of what her mother was at the same age.

Nellie smiled gently, as her eyes followed her baby girl a little while, and then she said:

"Now go, darling, and tell Norah to undress you. I know she fixed you up."

I learned afterward that Norah was the nurse. She had only been with them three days, and not as yet reduced to proper decorum. She was a merry-hearted daughter of Erin, and if allowed, would have made the little ones as happy.

"You know how to laugh, don't you?" said Freddie, coming to my side, when little Nellie went out.

"Indeed I do, my boy; and everybody about me knows how too," I answered.

"An't it nice?" he said. "I love to hear folks laugh; don't you?" sitting down beside me, and putting his soft white hand into mine; no marks of marble playing, top spinning, or anything of the kind, on his delicate fingers.

How I longed to catch the boy up and run off, dropping him where my little ones laughed and "went it" generally, to their hearts' content.

"Then why don't you laugh as much as you choose, Freddie?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't care to laugh myself much, but to hear others. Oh, if mamma and papa could laugh like you, I'd be the happiest boy alive! It's like the sunshine to me."

I turned my head away, as the boy talked on. I did not wish him to see the tears which came in pity for those little ones—for him most of all, who I knew felt it so keenly—this living "out of the sunshine."

"Freddie, love, go tell Norah she can take Nellie and Susie to walk; and you go with them, to take care of sisters, my little man," Nellie said, sending the boy away, to divert his thoughts, I knew. Turning to me, she said:

"Fannie, I fear you may receive a wrong impression of my husband, from hearing Freddie talk. He is not a harsh or unkind father, I assure you. He loves his children dearly, I know; but he is a little peculiar, I admit. He does not like to have the children noisy or rude. He is proud of them, and does everything in the world he thinks best for their happiness, or rather, their future good. It seems a little strange to me sometimes, and makes me sad, the difference between their childhood and mine. My father, you know, was so full of life and fun; the merriest one in the house; entering into our sport like one of us—laughing, singing, dancing, and just whatever we wished. What a wild set we were!"

"But I never have heard of any one of you going to the State's prison, or being indicted for any criminal offence," I said.

"No. It is wonderful how well all our boys have done—"

"Not a bit," I exclaimed, interrupting her. "Your father raised them properly. You all were raised in the sunshine, not under the shade."

"I understand you, Fannie," she said. "But see how hard it is for me—the change! If my mind and heart had been disciplined, this change would not seem so hard. Mr. Grafton thinks we should prepare the children for the stern realities of life. If they are made playthings of, and indulged in useless whims—"

"Fiddlesticks, Nellie!" I exclaimed, cutting her short. "I know just this: your children are starving."

"Starving!" she cried, in astonishment.

"Yes, starving—their little hearts, I mean—for those things children love so much. That boy almost broke my heart with the yearnings of his. Their father gives them raiment and food, good enough and sufficient; yet denies them that which is just as essential, I think—things to amuse and make them merry. Oh, I saw the tear in your eye when Freddy said those words, which told more than any same number of words I ever heard: 'Papa almost laughed.' Does he frolic with his children; bring them toys; give them parties; take them to shows?" I asked.

She shook her head, saying:

"It is not his nature to be merry; and the other things you have mentioned he thinks useless and wicked expenditures, the money for which had better be given to the poor children. Ours are taught this, and given a liberal amount for the purpose."

"That is all right—giving to the poor, and teaching your children to be charitable. But the depriving them of children's rational, yes, and national privileges—for fire-crackers, torpedoes and doll babies I consider as such—is a shame. And denying them the enjoyment of a good hearty laugh, which is as good as the sunshine, your boy said, is nothing short of a crime. Don't talk of anything, Fannie, like disciplining these little ones' minds; make merry their hearts. You may try to hide it from me, but I know you, too, love the sunshine, and are pining in this shaded and gloomy atmosphere."

"What can I do, Fannie?" she asked piteously.

"Put your foot down, and determine, for your children's sake, to let in the sunshine on their path."

I said a great deal more to her, but I do not believe she would ever have been able to raise her voice in opposition to her husband.

However, the next day an accident happened to Freddie, that came very near ending the yearnings of his loving heart.

Nellie's home was a very little way from the water, on the banks of a beautiful river. How Freddie ever learned to swim no one knew, or that he could, until he was brought home that morning nearer dead than alive.

Nothing could be learned concerning the accident, save that he was seen by some boatmen struggling in the water; and when one of them got to him, he held, clutching it tightly, a duck, for which they suppose he went out, and was seized with cramp as he turned to go back.

One night, while he still lay delirious with fever, his father and I watched beside him: Nellie the doctor had commanded to take rest.

Incessantly he talked—to mamma, Susie, Nellie, and once my name passed his lips; but never, thus far, had papa's been heard—words of endearment for all others. After a while he was pleading with John, the gardener. And Mr. Grafton drew near, and strained his ear to catch the words.

"Do let me take your gun, John? I can bring her down. Don't you know this is papa's birthday? I want so much to have that duck for him. If he knows I got it for him, may be he'll be pleased. And oh, may be he will put his hand on my shoulder and smile on me like Willie Reynolds' father does. And then, oh, then I'd be the happiest boy in the world. John, did your father ever talk and laugh with you? Oh, give me the gun. That's you. Steady, steady!"

An instant more, with a glad shout, he sprang up in the bed, crying out:

"I've winged her! Won't it please papa?"

Tenderly the father laid his boy down again, bending over him with a new light in his eyes, as he lay panting and exhausted before him. All the mystery was explained then. To win a smile from papa, the boy had risked his life. I stole quietly out of the room, leaving the father alone with his child.

On the result of that night, I felt sure, rested the future happiness of Nellie and her children.

It was near morning when I peeped into Freddie's room again. Both were sleeping quietly, sweetly; the father's head resting on the same pillow with his boy's, his arm thrown caressingly over him.

I knew then all was well. I need counsel Nellie no further. God, in his infinite mercy, had decided the happiness of all.

I was called suddenly home, a few days after. But I saw the sunshine had entered the father's heart, and knew its rays would give warmth and joy to all around him.

A year has passed since then, and he has brought them to see us. Once more I clasp in my arms the Nellie of olden times. I'm hearing again her merry, rippling laugh, and watching her dancing on the green with her children and mine. Near by stand their fathers. My eldest, a laughing romp of thirteen, coming up to Mr. Grafton, tries to draw him away to the dance. But with smiles as pleasant as those of his host, he declared his feet dreadfully stupid, and cannot be taught to dance; but his heart is with them, keeping perfect time to the music of the children's voices.